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ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	USNW-00	CA-00	CIAE-00	INL-00
	DODE-00	DS-00	UTED-00	FOE-00	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00
	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-00	DCP-00
	NSAE-00	OMB-00	PA-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00	ACE-00
	P-00	SGAC-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00
	EVR-00	FMP-00	R-00	IIP-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-00	G-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/001W		
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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2242
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS GABORONE 000951

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AF/S FOR MALONEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: REFUGEES IN BOTSWANA: AN UPDATE

REFERENCE: (A) 04 GABORONE 756

(B) GABORONE 535

1. SUMMARY: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Botswana and the Francistown Vicariate of the Catholic Church are exploring the possibility of providing anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment to a limited number of refugees. Approximately 550 Angolan refugees are registered to return home in mid-July. Repatriation of Namibian refugees, complicated by political factors, is proceeding more slowly. Zimbabwean refugees fear that Mugabe agents are circulating in Dukwi camp. The GOB continues to detain refuge/asylum seekers and their children until their initial interviews despite objections from UNHCR. Mission has encouraged the GOB to review its policy not to provide ARV treatment to refugees and is exploring possibilities to materially support efforts to do so through civil society. END SUMMARY.

POSSIBLE ARV TREATMENT FOR SOME REFUGEES

2. The UNHCR and the Francistown Vicariate of the Catholic Church are exploring possibilities of providing ARV treatment to some residents of the Dukwi refugee camp, located an hour's drive northwest of Francistown in north-eastern Botswana. The GOB maintains that budgetary constraints do not allow it to extend to refugees the free access to ARV treatment enjoyed by Batswana and that most will not benefit from such treatment once repatriated. Bishop Nubuasah of the Francistown Vicariate told PolOff on June 28 that the Catholic Church already pays for ARV treatment for 25 patients who are ineligible to receive treatment from the Government. According to the Bishop, the Vicariate could accommodate an additional 25 patients. If UNHCR can ensure that refugees will be able to travel from Dukwi to Francistown on a regular basis for the necessary check ups, the Vicariate will include them in the program, thereby bringing it to full capacity. While UNHCR representative at Dukwi Maureen Masters welcomed this opportunity, she pointed out that the number of refugees in need of treatment exceeded the additional 25 the Vicariate could fund.

3. UNHCR HIV/AIDS Coordinator for southern Africa Laurie Bruns told PolOff on June 30 that UNHCR's ultimate hope is to persuade the GOB to amend its policy to include refugees in its ARV and PMTCT programs on an equal basis with Batswana. She pointed out that given the small number of refugees in Botswana, their inclusion would occasion only a minor increase in the total bill for HIV/AIDS treatment. Bruns agreed that failing to provide effective prevention in the camp undermined prevention campaigns in the surrounding communities, which intermingle with the refugees.

4. Few refugees take advantage of the counselling and testing services offered to them, Masters told PolOff, because they know treatment is not available. Although both UNHCR and the Red Cross have prevention programs involving peer educators, the general disinterest in

knowing one's status undermines these efforts.

ETHNIC TENSIONS AMONG CONGOLESE REFUGEES

15. According to Masters, the security situation in the refugee camp is also somewhat problematic. Recently, ethnic and regional differences among some of the Congolese had created tensions. These were brought to a head when a Congolese man from one group accused four from a rival group of stealing from a UNHCR ration warehouse. Counter-accusations ensued and polarized the Congolese community. The Botswana Police Service took the four suspects into custody and relocated them to the Center for Illegal Immigrants in Francistown. Mr. Rufus Tawana, Deputy Commander of the camp, told PolOff on June 27 that the police did not have enough evidence to charge the four. Nonetheless, he expected the four suspects to remain in detention until tempers have cooled. Although uneasy with the indefinite detention of the suspects, Masters thought that the incident had caused tensions to reach a boiling point and hoped that the absence of the four would ease that situation.

ZIMBABWEANS FEAR MUGABE'S HENCHMEN

16. A second security concern involved complaints from Zimbabweans. Masters estimated that Zimbabweans

accounted for roughly 70 percent of new refuge/asylum seekers. On several occasions, she said, Zimbabweans living in the camp had expressed their belief that security agents from the Government of Zimbabwe were moving among refugees in the camp. She had no evidence to confirm or disprove these fears, but given the openness of the facility, did not dismiss them. Mr. Tawana told PolOff that the camp administrators had received such complaints. He pointed out, however, that when the GOB had stationed Botswana Defense Force troops at the camp "human rights groups" had complained that this restricted the refugees' freedom of movement, so they were removed. In the absence of evidence that Zimbabwean or other residents are in danger, the GOB is unlikely to enhance security at the camp.

ANGOLAN REPATRIATION IN MID-JULY

17. Approximately 550 Angolans have registered for a repatriation scheduled for mid-July. UNHCR was still awaiting final confirmation from the BDF of whether it would provide two planes to transport refugees on one day or one plane that would make two trips on separate dates. This repatriation would halve the number of Angolans in the camp. Masters explained to PolOff that at the end of 2005, UNHCR no longer will provide assistance to Angolan refugees, either in the form of repatriation or the food and non-food rations it currently provides. She hoped to be able to organize another repatriation before year-end but believed that would depend on whether the feedback from those Angolans who returned in July could convince the sceptics that it is safe to go home.

MOST NAMIBIANS STILL RELUCTANT TO RETURN

18. Repatriation of the slightly larger number of Namibian refugees (about 1,200) is proceeding more slowly. Only thirty-six Namibians signed up to participate in two repatriations earlier this year, which UNHCR Country Representative Benny Otim described to PolOff as largely symbolic. Masters explained that many Namibians genuinely fear for their safety upon return to Namibia. A significant portion, however, refuse to return for political reasons. During a registration exercise in June, several Namibian refugees indicated that they intended to return only to "an independent Caprivi." Recognizing that repatriations to the Caprivi Strip weaken their cause, advocates of independence for Caprivi discourage their compatriots within the camp from returning.

REFUGEE/ASYLUM SEEKERS WAIT IN PRISON FOR INTERVIEW

19. In 2002, the GOB instituted a policy that refuge and asylum seekers would have to wait in the Center for Illegal Immigrants (operated by the Department of Prisons) until their interview by the Refugee Advisory Committee. They could then transfer to the refugee camp in Dukwi to await a decision by the Ministry of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration on whether they would be accepted as refugees or asylees. In a June 28 meeting with PolOff, Commanding Officer at the Center Mr. Diseko, could not say what prompted the GOB to institute this costly policy change. (Unlike at the camp, where UNHCR provides food and clothing, the GOB must provide for those at the Center.) He explained that the Center has a capacity of 500 but rarely has more than 200 inmates at a time. Roughly one-third of these,

Diseko estimated, are refuge/asylum seekers who can be in detention for months before their interview. Most of the remainder are illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe who rarely stay more than one night before being deported.

110. According to Masters, some refuge/asylum seekers have complained to the UNHCR of conditions in the Center. Some claimed to have been beaten by guards there. Others complained that family members rarely got to see one another. UNHCR, which opposes the practice of detaining refuge/asylum seekers, has specifically objected to the detention of children in the Center whose parents are awaiting interviews. These children do not have access to education or recreation for the duration of their detention, which can last for months. Mr. Diseko confirmed to PolOff that five such children currently were in detention with a parent. He denied, however, any incidents of violence within the camp, either among inmates themselves or involving guards, since the March 2004 escape attempt and riot that left the would-be escapee dead and one inmate severely injured (Ref A).

COMMENT

111. Mission has encouraged the GOB to reassess its refusal to provide ARV treatment to refugees (Ref B). While that advocacy will continue, Mission is also exploring with UNHCR and the Francistown Vicariate possibilities to obtain additional funding to expand the Vicariate's existing program and enable it to send doctors to the camp rather than require refugees to travel to Francistown.

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